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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y --CLASSIFIED BY LINE ADDED

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SR](#)
SUBJECT: TOUGH MESSAGE ON KOSOVO INDEPENDENCE AND BELGRADE
NEGOTIATING ENGAGEMENT

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CLASSIFIED BY POLOFF IAN CAMPBELL FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) (D)

¶1. (c) Summary: In meetings with U.S. Special Envoy Frank Wisner in Belgrade on April 17, PM Kostunica, President Tadic, and FM Draskovic reiterated strong GoS opposition to an independence outcome in Kosovo status talks, but sought to reassure that Belgrade was not seeking a "permanent carve-out" for Serbs there. Wisner was unambiguous in his private discussions about U.S. certainty that Kosovo would be independent as a result of talks and offered to help with necessary protections for Serbs and other minorities. The U.S. could not cooperate, however, with a political project that sought to undermine Kosovo's stability.

¶2. (c) Wisner also met with senior leaders of the Serbian Orthodox Church on its ongoing efforts to contribute to the talks and with representatives of the Contact Group to brief on his meetings (septel). Press play of the visit focused on timeline (outcome of talks by the end of the year) and on GoS intention to table the details of its "more than autonomy, less than independence" proposal in the near future. End summary.

¶3. (c) During his April 16-18 visit to Belgrade, Special Kosovo Envoy Frank Wisner met separately with PM Kostunica, President Tadic, and FM Draskovic. Tadic and Kostunica were both accompanied by senior negotiators Leon Kojen and Slobodan Samardzic. Chief of Staff Nikitovic also attended the Kostunica meeting; executive assistant Vuk Jeremic accompanied President Tadic. Wisner had a working lunch with Kojen and Samardzic which included Tadic advisor Dusan Batakovic and Kostunica advisor Aleksander Simic. Discussions with Serbian Orthodox Church representatives included Metropolitan Amfilohije, Bishops Gregorije and Jovan, and SOC International Affairs advisor Father Irinej Dobrivojevic. Wisner met with "Kosovo pool reporters" from several leading Belgrade dailies in a short press event. Wisner's meeting with local Contact Group representatives on April 19 is reported septel. Ambassador Polt accompanied Wisner to all meetings.

¶4. (c) Wisner reviewed the details of his latest discussions in Europe for GoS principals. He noted encouraging signs from Brussels that the EU was preparing for its role in supporting implementation of the final settlement. The U.S. and EU were working closely together. From talks with Ahtisaari and his discussions in Pristina he also saw signs that the new leadership in Pristina was moving in the right direction and was prepared to engage in a substantive and credible way on protections for Kosovo's minority communities. Wisner noted that while in Kosovo he had met with Serbs, Turks, Bosniacs, and other minorities and all had been unreserved in their expressed desire to stay and prosper in Kosovo and in their frustration that Belgrade continued to block progress. The negotiations, noted Wisner, had appeared to hit a roadblock and it was difficult not to conclude

that Belgrade was responsible. Recent developments, including the "one salary" edict and other unhelpful CCK requirements, as well as credible reports of MUP intimidation, were suggesting that Belgrade was determined to be unhelpful. Wisner acknowledged the need for strong guaranteed protections for Serbs and other minorities, but the U.S. would not cooperate in any effort to permanently tie Kosovo Serbs to Belgrade or to prevent the development of a stable Kosovo government.

KOSTUNICA: REGION CONCERNED W/ INDEPENDENCE - PLEASE RECONSIDER

15. (c) Kostunica acknowledged difficulties in decentralization talks but defended the Serb position as constructive, consistent with Contact Group guiding principles and solely seeking to protect the basic vital interests of Serbs in Kosovo. If there were difficulties on decentralization now, this suggested many more complications on status and argued for a reconsideration of any "predetermined" outcomes. Kostunica noted his conversations with nearby states - Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia - had suggested support for Belgrade's position of "substantial autonomy along European standards." Recent conversations with French PM Chirac during a recent visit to Paris had identified a similar sympathy in the CG for respecting Serbia's territorial integrity and general principles of decentralization. (Note: The French Ambassador in Belgrade, who had attended the Kostunica-Chirac meeting, told Ambassadors Polt and Wisner that Chirac had been very clear in pointing out that Kosovo independence was inevitable.) Kostunica rejected suggestions that Belgrade was blocking participation in the PISG, noting that Serbs did participate at the municipal level and were committed to participating at all levels once they were assured of basic guarantees for their safety and rights.

16. (c) Kostunica said that no Serb would accept an independence outcome and he encouraged the U.S. and the Contact Group to reconsider its fixation on that goal. The only objective for Belgrade was securing the human rights of Serbs, which had been trampled on during the last six years. Kostunica told Wisner that he would be presenting the details of the GoS position on autonomy shortly - suggesting it would be an innovative proposal somewhere between the strong centralization of France and the

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more decentralized structure of Belgium. He asked Wisner to consider it carefully in all its details and allow for a re-think of independence. Kostunica said he was convinced that independence would be bad for the region. If the international community insisted, Serbs would not accept it and there would be "very negative consequences." Kojen reviewed some details of the Serb negotiating position at Vienna and insisted that Belgrade was seeking a "viable outcome, not a permanent carve-out."

TADIC: CONCERNS ABOUT STABILITY

17. (c) Tadic also expressed his view that independence was the wrong outcome, arguing that it would likely destabilize not only Kosovo but Serbia as well. Tadic said he had a deep understanding and appreciation for the U.S. position on Kosovo's independence, but he said his focus would continue to be on ways of minimizing instability in Serbia. On participation of Serbs in Kosovo's institutions, Tadic reviewed in detail his decision in 2004 to call for Serb participation in elections. Little had been achieved: Serbs in Kosovo had overwhelmingly rejected the idea with less than one percent voting, and his numbers had dropped 5 percent in Serbia. Tadic said that notwithstanding anecdotal information suggesting a groundswell for Serbs to engage in the PISG, the reality on the ground was much more complicated. Any push on participation would encourage greater division among Serbs in Kosovo, encourage new divisions among parties in Serbia, and be worse for stability in both places. It was unrealistic, suggested Tadic, to demand that he focus on one issue to the exclusion of all others. Every decision he took on Kosovo had to take account of a series of interlocking considerations. It was "dangerous" to focus solely on independence for Kosovo without considering larger implications.

18. (c) Tadic said he was actively considering the elements of a workable exit strategy. He confessed to "not knowing whether partition was a good idea," but he viewed it as an intellectual argument that ignored the 60 percent of Serbs south of the Ibar river. Ultimately, said Tadic, the solution lay not in a "technical talks approach" in Vienna that suggested discrete solutions to interconnected problems but rather a more comprehensive approach that included Serbia's discussion of the details of implementation. Kojen noted that his comments on a "viable outcome not a permanent carve-out" were meant to assure that Belgrade had no intention of undermining Kosovo or tying Serbs there to its apron strings forever. But transitional arrangements in Belgrade's view were not a question of 2-3 years and were more likely to give way to progress for both Kosovo and Serbia on EU integration. Tadic said that he continued to see common interests for Serbia and the U.S. in resolving regional problems including Kosovo.

LUNCH WITH NEGOTIATING TEAM

19. (c) Chief negotiators Kojen and Samardzic took strong exception to suggestions that Belgrade was obstructing the decentralization talks, and they strongly denied that Belgrade sought a permanent carve-out or a fully autonomous entity in Kosovo. Instead, their goal was simply to ensure "essential living conditions and fundamental freedoms" for the K-Serbs, regardless of the status outcome, they claimed. Both negotiators emphasized that the law of Kosovo, not Serbia, would obviously prevail throughout Kosovo. Regarding the details of the decentralization negotiations, Samardzic divided the Serb position into two baskets -- "identity" issues and security issues. He said that the Serbs sought a substantial measure of autonomy (including vertical links) for Serb-majority municipalities in six "identity" areas (education, health, culture, religion, etc.) and merely "enhanced competencies" in two security areas (police and judiciary). They stressed that Belgrade was prepared to offer provide full transparency, but not a veto, to Pristina regarding any vertical interactions with K-Serb municipalities. (Kojen averred that Pristina insisted on controlling inflows of money in order to prevent K-Serb municipalities from enjoying better-funded health and educational facilities.) In the security area, they underscored that police and judicial organs in K-Serb municipalities would be part of Kosovo-wide institutions, although they argued for a strong municipal role in selecting judges and police chiefs. Referring to a "troubling dinner" with Ahtissaari and some cynical comments by Rohan, Kojen closed by noting that the Belgrade team suspected that UNOSEK was not committed to the negotiations and was merely going through the motions.

DRASKOVIC

110. (c) There was nothing new in the Draskovic meeting. The FonMin simply reiterated his standard plea for a "European solution" to Kosovo status that would leave the Albanian majority in control in Kosovo, but the international borders of Serbia, including Kosovo, unchanged. Draskovic also pushed hard against a Kosovo UN seat, arguing that giving Kosovo such membership was

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like awarding a student a university degree and then asking him to begin to study for that degree. Ambassador Wisner challenged the logic of withholding the UN seat for Kosovo, asking Draskovic whether doing so would lead to Belgrade's acquiescence to independence. Predictably, Draskovic was not prepared to strike such a deal.

SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

111. (c) Both sides reviewed the Church's concerns and its role in the ongoing status talks. Amfilohije raised concerns about destruction and vandalism at one of the SOC cemeteries and showed

a photograph of trash dumped at the site. Wisner promised to check to see what could be done (material faxed to USOP). Father Irinej asked for support for a project to return 1,000 Serbs to Prizren in connection with the reconstruction of Church buildings there. He also asked that Wisner raise with Ahtisaari the possibility of SOC representatives being allowed to attend Vienna talks dealing with Church interests, but not attached to the Belgrade negotiating team. Wisner promised to follow-up on both issues.

COMMENT

¶12. (c) Ambassador Wisner's visit was both timely and effective. His clear private reaffirmation of U.S. support for Kosovo independence finally laid to rest any lingering doubts or hopes among Belgrade's leadership. Wisner's tough "no permanent carve-outs" message and sharp rebuke of recent CCK actions also put down a clear marker that the U.S. would not tolerate obstruction or delay of the negotiations process.

¶13. (c) The Serbian reaction was predictable, both in asserting their genuine desire for negotiations progress, as well as in their complete rejection of an independence outcome. Our reaction and that of the Ahtisaari team should be to simply push forward with the negotiations, not based on Belgrade or Pristina bluster, but on what we consider to be a reasonable deal protecting Serbians' future in an independent Kosovo.

¶14. (c) In the end, independence -- as well as some of the envisioned minority rights -- will likely have to be imposed. Give that Belgrade is hoping on some Contact Group disunity on this imposition, the manner of taking this action matters. Some of our contact group partners have called for "soft imposition," meaning a face saving way of delivering Belgrade the bitter pill. If that is the price for getting the Russians and maybe some others in the CG on board, it is worth paying. In addition to offering Belgrade a small fig leaf, it could help accelerate Belgrade's tolerance of an independent Kosovo and a lessen domestic political consequences. Despite Draskovic's response to Wisner, a delayed UN seat may be possibly be a useful device in that regard and we should consider it.

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